



Will Head reveals Windows Vista's hidden secrets to help make your life easier

Windows Vista is growing in popularity and in many ways is better than Windows XP, but there is still some room for improvement. Whether you want Windows to look different, work faster or

provide a greater level of security, we've got the tips you need. Some of the tips are quite advanced, but you don't need to be an expert to use many of them. We've rated each tip to indicate how tricky it is.

We've found so many ways to customise and optimise Microsoft's latest operating system that we've had to split the tips over two months. This is the first collection of the finest Vista tips available. Watch out for even more next month.

CUSTOMISATION



ILLUSTRATION: MAGIC TORCH

▲ Blow up your desktop icons to make them easier to see

LARGE DESKTOP ICONS

Level Beginner

Windows Vista version All

Resizing icons on the desktop can be a simple matter of changing the display resolution in Windows. Very high or low resolutions can make applications tricky to use, though, and LCD monitor owners will get the best display quality by using their screen's native resolution. If you find the icons on your desktop hard to see, use Vista's zoom feature instead.

With the desktop showing, hold down the Ctrl key and use the scroll wheel on your mouse. Roll it towards you to make the icons smaller and away to increase their size. Icons that represent Windows components, such as the Recycle Bin and Windows Explorer, will expand to the maximum size available, filling the screen. Some third-party applications don't include super-sized icons, in which case you'll see a normal-sized icon in a huge square frame.

The same effect works in Windows Explorer, which is particularly useful if you have a folder full of images. Expanding the icons to enlarge the image thumbnails should make finding the photo you're looking for easier.



▲ Hide an icon's text to show just the image

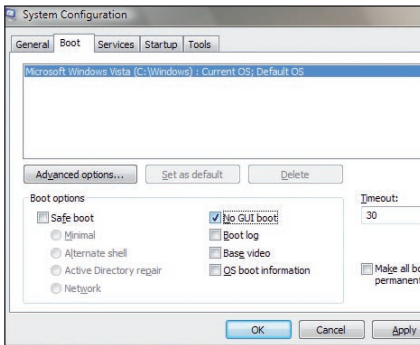
REMOVE DESKTOP ICON DESCRIPTIONS

Level Intermediate

Windows Vista version All

If you like to have icons on your desktop, but you think that the text below each looks untidy, you can make it disappear. Select an icon on the desktop, right-click it and choose Rename. Delete the text and then hold down the Alt key and enter 255 on the numeric keypad (while keeping Alt held down). Release the Alt key and

Windows should add a symbol to the icon's name. However, it won't display the symbol, which in effect makes the title invisible. If it doesn't work, make sure the keyboard's Num lock key is enabled. In addition to Alt-255, you can also use Alt-0160. As each icon on the desktop needs a unique name, make sure you use a different combination of Alt-255 and Alt-0160 for each one. For example, use Alt-255 Alt-0160 for the first icon and Alt-255 Alt-255 for the second.



▲ Make Windows' boot screen more exciting

MAKE WINDOWS BOOT LOOK BETTER

Level Beginner

Windows Vista version All

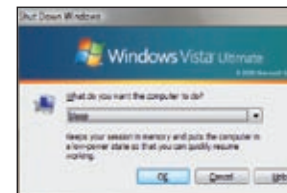
The boot screen you see when Vista loads is barely different from those of previous versions of Windows. Vista includes a nicer-looking boot screen – the one you see when you wake your PC from hibernation – but it's not enabled by default. To change this, type 'msconfig' into the Start menu search box to start the System Configuration utility and click on the Boot tab. Tick the box next to 'No GUI boot', then click OK and reboot your PC to see the new boot screen.

CLASSIC SHUTDOWN MENU

Level Beginner

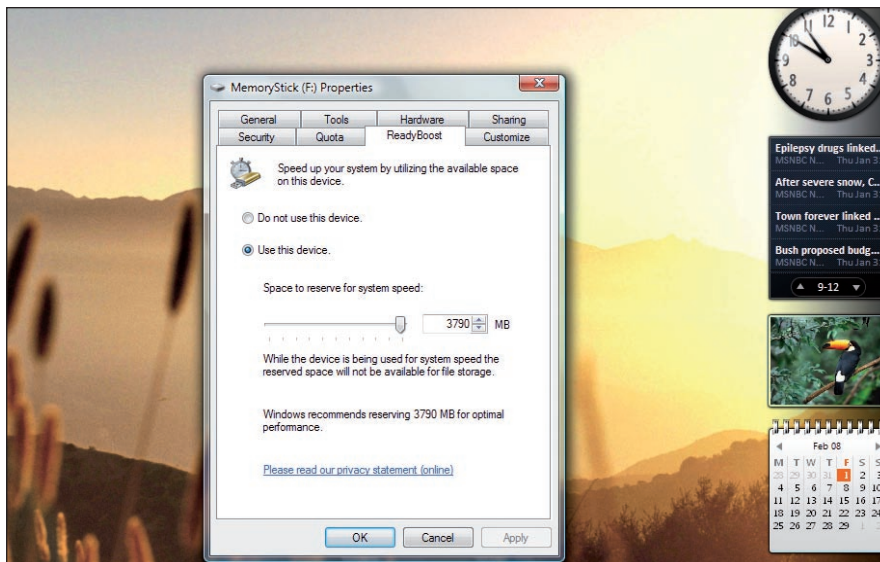
Windows Vista version All

If you miss the old shutdown menu from Windows XP, simply click on an empty area of the Desktop and press Alt-F4 to bring it back.



◀ Vista may have new shutdown buttons, but the old menu is still there

PERFORMANCE



▲ You can use memory cards and USB flash drives to boost Vista's memory

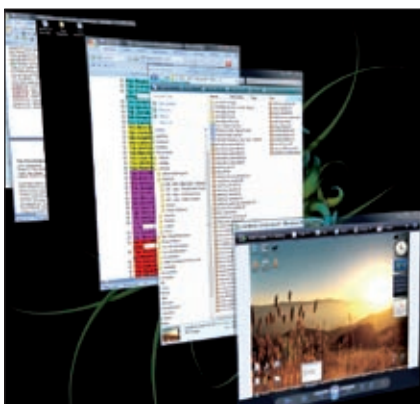
BOOST SYSTEM MEMORY WITH A FLASH DRIVE

Level Beginner

Windows Vista version All

ReadyBoost is a Windows Vista feature that can speed up your system by using flash memory to cache frequently used files. However, if you use a USB flash drive for this, you have to remember to plug it in to an available port each time you switch on your machine. A flash drive can also look a little untidy sticking out of the USB port. Luckily you can also use a built-in card reader for digital camera memory cards if you have one. Simply pop a card into the slot and Vista will check to see if it's fast enough to use for ReadyBoost. If it is, select the 'Speed up my system' link from the AutoPlay dialog.

You can tell Vista how much space ReadyBoost can use on the card, but if you intend to have it enabled all the time, it's probably best to buy a dedicated card and let ReadyBoost use all the space available.



▲ New shortcuts provide easy access to Vista features such as the Flip 3D task manager

WINDOWS SHORTCUT KEYS

Level Beginner

Windows Vista version All

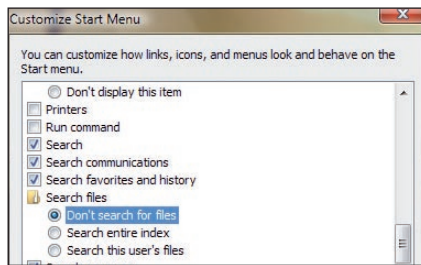
Ever since Microsoft introduced the Windows key on its keyboards, it has added compatible shortcuts with each new release of its operating system. In Vista you can continue to use the old commands such as Windows-E to launch Windows Explorer and Windows-R to bring up the Run dialog. Windows-Pause/Break opens the System section of Control Panel and Windows-L displays the Switch User screen, while also locking your current session.

Vista introduces a whole host of new shortcuts, including Windows-T to cycle through items on the taskbar, displaying small preview windows if you're using the Aero

interface. The Windows-Tab shortcut activates Flip 3D, which is Vista's 3D version of the standard Windows Alt-Tab shortcut. This enables you to switch between tasks quickly.

You can also use Windows-1 to launch the first icon in your Quick Launch toolbar, or replace 1 with any number up to 9 to access other items in the toolbar. Some other useful shortcuts include:

- Windows-G** Cycle through sidebar gadgets
- Windows-D** Show the desktop
- Windows-M** Minimise all windows
- Windows-F** Search
- Windows-F4** Log off
- Windows-F6** Restart
- Windows-F8** Shutdown



▲ Make your Start menu searches snappier

SPEED UP START MENU SEARCH

Level Intermediate

Windows Vista version All

The search box at the bottom of the Start menu is an extremely useful way of launching applications. You no longer have to hunt around the Programs menu to find the folder that contains the application you want. Instead, just tap a few letters of the program or file's name into the box and you'll see a list of matches to choose from. This can be slow, however,

because the system looks for any potential matches among your files as well as searching through your list of installed applications.

If you don't need the search facility to look through your documents as well, and would rather it was faster, right-click on the Start menu and select Properties. Click the Customize button, scroll down to the 'Search files' section near the bottom, select 'Don't search for files' rather than 'Search this user's files' and then click OK.

PREVENTING APPLICATIONS RUNNING AT STARTUP

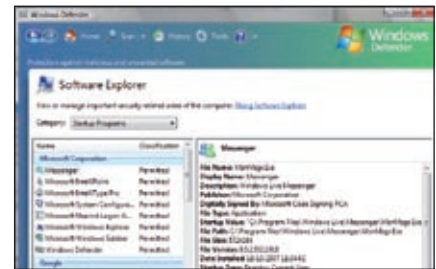
Level Intermediate

Windows Vista version All

In earlier versions of Windows, applications could make changes to the system, enabling them to run automatically when the PC started. Reducing the number of programs that start automatically can speed up a PC's performance, as it's not wasting resources on programs you rarely use. However, finding the programs to remove used to mean a lot of hunting around.

Life is easier with Vista's Defender utility, which provides a single place where you can easily block applications that try to run automatically.

Enter 'Defender' into the Start menu search box and run it. Click on Tools at the top of the screen and choose Software Explorer. Select Startup Programs from the Category list and scroll through the list of applications until you see the one you want to stop. Click Disable or Remove. If you can't find the program you're looking for, click the 'Show for all users' button to see everything on the system.



▲ Preserve your resources by preventing applications running automatically

FILES AND FOLDERS



▲ Even if you've got an upgrade version of Vista, you can still do a clean installation

CREATE A CLEAN INSTALLATION WITH AN UPGRADE DISC

Level: Advanced

Windows Vista version All

Microsoft has always offered cheaper upgrade versions of its software for users who own the previous version. The installation program checks for a previous version before it proceeds, which is no problem if you launch it from a PC running the older operating system.

However, sometimes it's best to do a clean installation. Before Vista, Windows would let you install an upgrade version from scratch, and you simply inserted your old installation disc at the appropriate moment. Vista won't allow this, but there is a way around it. Clearly, following this tip without owning an older version of Windows is against Microsoft's licensing rules.

You can install Vista without entering a product key, which basically starts a 30-day trial. Boot from your installation DVD and, when you're asked for the key, click Next. Select your version of Vista and continue as normal. Once Vista is up and running, launch the installation again, this time from within Vista. Choose an upgrade installation and enter your product key.

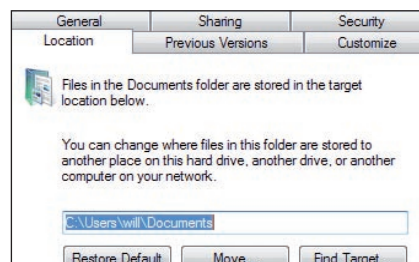
MOVE YOUR DOCUMENTS FOLDER

Level Intermediate

Windows Vista version All

By default, Vista stores your documents on the C: drive under \Users\[username]\Documents. This is fine for most people, but if you want to keep your personal files somewhere else, while still taking advantage of the handy Documents link in Explorer and the file browser, you can tell Vista to look elsewhere for your files. Just find the special Documents folder in Windows Explorer, right-click it and choose Properties from the context menu.

Choose the Location tab, enter the new location for your files and click 'Move...'. Vista



▲ Keep your Documents folder wherever you like

will ask you if you want to move your existing documents over, and will then use your new location to save everything.

DISABLE FILE DELETE CONFIRMATION

Level Intermediate

Windows Vista version All

By default, when you hit the Delete key to get rid of a file, Vista will ask you if you're sure you want to delete it. This gives you a useful last opportunity to make sure you haven't accidentally selected the wrong file, but if you're tidying up your hard disk, the constant warnings can become irritating. Turn this message off by right-clicking the Recycle Bin and selecting Properties. At the bottom of the dialog box untick 'Display delete confirmation dialog' and click OK. From now on, Vista will carry out your delete commands without bothering you.

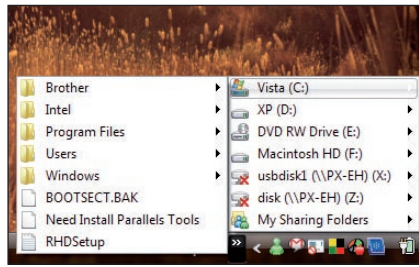


ACCESS FILES FROM THE TASKBAR

Level Beginner

Windows Vista version All

To access your files quickly, add a file menu to the taskbar. Right-click on an empty area of the taskbar and choose Toolbars, New Toolbar. Navigate to your desktop, choose Computer and click the Select Folder button to add it to your taskbar. To access your files, click the >> icon next to the new Computer entry. Use the pop-up menus that now appear to find your file.



▲ Add your files directly to the taskbar

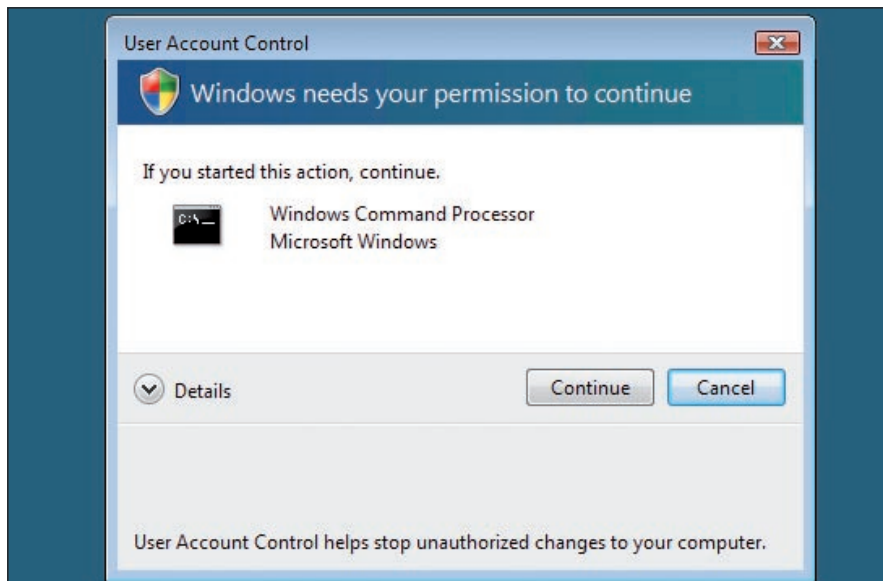
FIND RECENT DOCUMENTS

Level Beginner

Windows Vista version All

Vista's new built-in Search allows you to find documents according to the date they were modified. Open Windows Explorer, hover the mouse pointer over the Date Modified column and click the down arrow that appears on the right-hand side of the column. Choose 'Stack by Date modified' to see groups of documents based on when you last changed them.

SECURITY AND NETWORKING



▲ Use Ctrl-Shift-Return to launch applications with administrator privileges

QUICKLY OPEN PROGRAMS WITH ADMINISTRATOR PRIVILEGES

Level Intermediate

Windows Vista version All

Windows Vista has introduced much better security controls than were available in previous versions of Windows, including running programs with restricted user rights. This helps to protect Vista PCs from viruses and other malicious programs. However, there are times when you need to run certain programs with administrator privileges. You can create a dedicated shortcut for this purpose, but if you need to run a program only once, that can be a long-winded way to go about it.

Instead, simply enter the name of the program you want to run into the search box on the Start menu. Then, rather than simply pressing the Return key to launch it, hold down Ctrl-Shift-Return. If you've got User Account Control turned on, the program will run and you will be able to perform operations with administrator privileges.

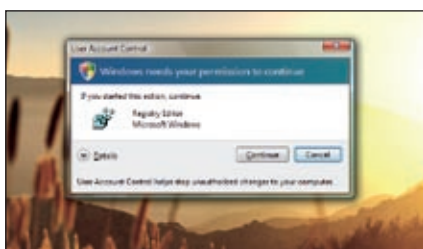
STOP WINDOWS BLACKING OUT THE UAC SCREEN

Level Advanced

Windows Vista version All

User Account Control (UAC) is a useful security measure, but whenever you run a program that needs administrator privileges it blacks out the screen and stops you doing anything until you allow it to run (or not). If you want to keep UAC enabled but would rather it was less intrusive, you can set it to run without locking you out of the system whenever it asks you a question. This reduces your security slightly, so use this tip only if UAC's behaviour really bothers you.

Open the Registry Editor and navigate to HKey_Local_Machine\Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Policies\System. On the right-hand side, scroll down until you see a key called PromptOnSecureDesktop and change the value from 1 to 0.



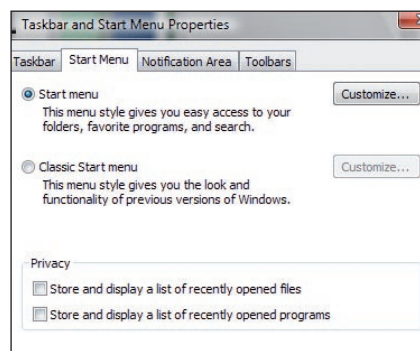
▲ UAC doesn't have to lock you out of your PC whenever it needs your attention

HIDE RECENT ACTIVITY FROM THE START MENU

Level Beginner

Windows Vista version All

Windows Vista provides some useful shortcuts to help you continue working from where you left off by storing a list of recently opened files and applications on the Start menu. However, if you're using a shared computer (or you'd just rather not have a record of your recent activity stored) you can turn this off. Right-click on the Start button and click Properties. On the Start menu tab, untick 'Store and display a list of recently opened files' and 'Store and display a list of recently opened programs' in the Privacy section and then click OK.



▲ Stop Vista keeping a list of the files and programs you've recently used

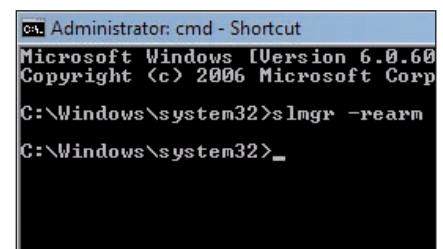
EXTEND VISTA ACTIVATION TIME

Level Advanced

Windows Vista version All

When you install Windows Vista on a PC, you can use it for 30 days before you have to activate it. This is the so-called grace period. However, Microsoft will let you reset the grace period three times, in effect allowing you to run Vista for 120 days before making you decide whether or not it's right for your machine.

To see how long you have left before you have to activate Vista, open Control Panel and select System from the System and Maintenance section. At the bottom it tells you how many days you have left before the trial period ends. If it's close to running out, open a command prompt with administrator privileges and enter 'slmgr -rearm'. After you've rebooted your machine you will have a further 30 days until you're required to activate Windows. **CS**



▲ If you want to try out Vista before activating, you can reset the 30-day countdown three times